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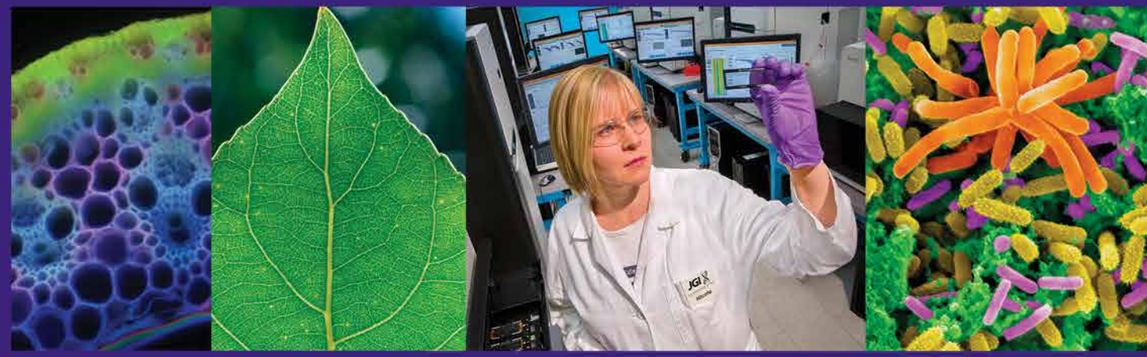
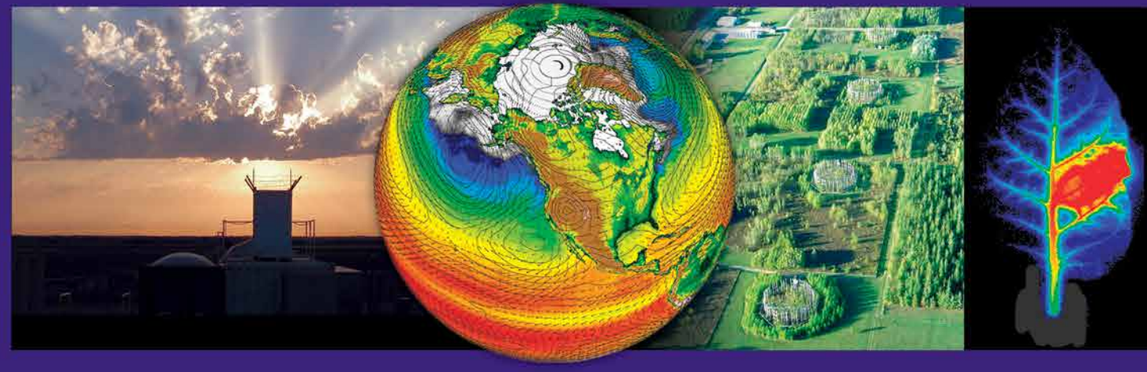
Biological and Environmental Research

Understand Complex Biological and Environmental Systems by…

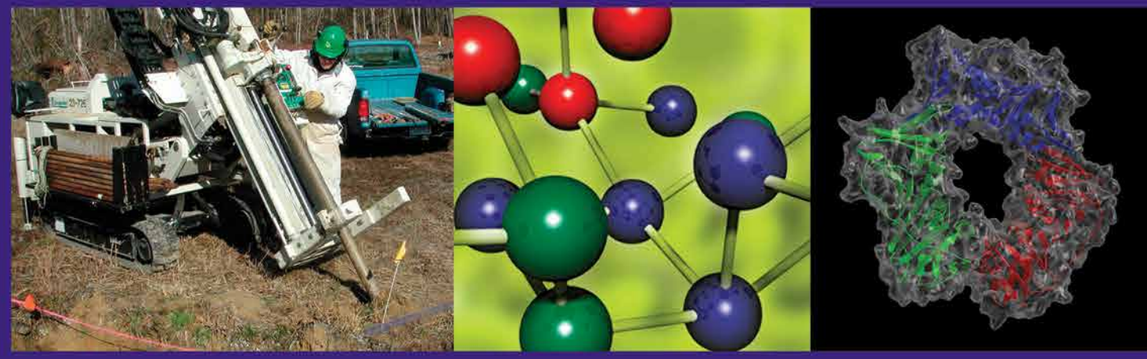
EXPLORING the frontiers of genome-enabled biology



DISCOVERING the physical, chemical, and biological drivers of climate change



SEEKING the biological, geochemical, and hydrological determinants of environmental sustainability and stewardship

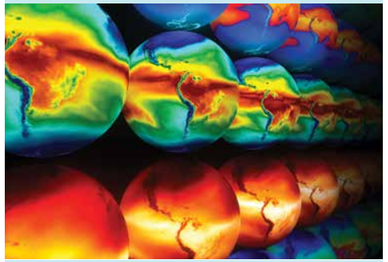


U.S. DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY | Office of Science

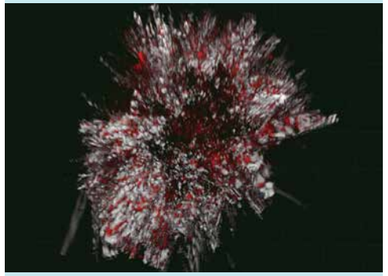
DOE Mission-Inspired Science

Addressing critical national needs

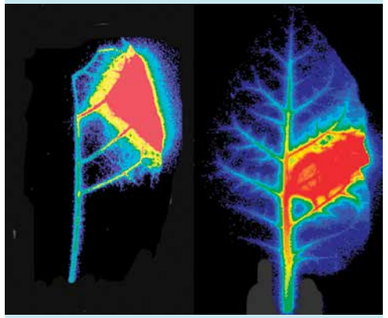
Insights from genomics are advancing the development of grasses and fast-growing trees for biofuel production.



Model simulations project future climate.



Microbes can transform minerals in the subsurface environment.



Movement of plant compounds is tracked using radiochemistry tools developed for human medicine.

Sustainable Biofuels

To support the development of biofuels as major sustainable national energy resources, the DOE Biological and Environmental Research (BER) program is using the power of genomics and systems biology to study microbes, fungi, and plants important to solving energy challenges.

Climate Science

To inform decision making about energy use and climate change, BER is seeking to resolve the greatest uncertainties in climate science. Research activities include studying the effects of greenhouse gas emissions on Earth's climate and biosphere, improving the world's most powerful climate models, and working to understand carbon cycling in terrestrial ecosystems.

Subsurface Biogeochemistry

To advance understanding and predictions of contaminant mobility in the subsurface, BER is developing predictive models that integrate hydrological, microbiological, and geochemical knowledge over a range of scales. These models also will aid assessments of potential approaches to carbon sequestration and waste isolation.

Biology-Physics Interface

To develop technologies that are transferable to diverse applications, BER is exploring research at the interface of biological and physical sciences.

Biological and Environmental Research

Mission

Advance world-class biological and environmental research and provide scientific user facilities to support Department of Energy missions in scientific discovery and innovation, energy security, and environmental responsibility.

Approach

- Understand complex biological and environmental systems across many spatial and temporal scales.
- Leverage diverse scientific insights by coupling theory, observations, experiments, models, and simulations.
- Support interdisciplinary research that engages scientists from national laboratories, academia, and industry.

Divisions

Biological Systems Science Division (BSSD)

BSSD aims to achieve a predictive understanding of complex biological systems with potential use in bioenergy, carbon cycling and biosequestration, and biogeochemistry.

BSSD activities include

- Using genomics and systems biology to understand plants and microbes.
- Developing the DOE Systems Biology Knowledgebase (KBase), a community data and software environment for analyzing and modeling biological systems.
- Supporting DOE Bioenergy Research Centers to provide transformational breakthroughs in cellulosic biofuels.
- Developing real-time, high-resolution technologies for analyzing dynamic biological processes.

Climate and Environmental Sciences Division (CESD)

CESD aims to advance a robust, predictive understanding of Earth's climate and environmental systems.

CESD activities include

- Synthesizing new process knowledge and innovative computational methods advancing next-generation, integrated human–Earth system models.
- Developing, testing, and simulating process-level understanding of atmospheric systems and terrestrial ecosystems.
- Advancing fundamental understanding of coupled biogeochemical processes in complex subsurface environments.
- Enhancing the unique capabilities and impacts of the ARM and EMSL scientific user facilities to achieve unprecedented understanding of Earth's dynamic processes.

DOE Bioenergy Research Centers

Bringing together top scientists from multiple disciplines, DOE BER established three Bioenergy Research Centers in 2007 to deliver high-risk, high-return breakthroughs in cellulosic biofuel production. DOE's Oak Ridge National Laboratory leads the BioEnergy Science Center in Tennessee. The University of Wisconsin–Madison leads the Great Lakes Bioenergy Research Center. DOE's Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory leads the Joint BioEnergy Institute in California. Each center is using genomics and advanced analytical technologies to understand (1) how to make grasses, wood, and other cellulosic materials easier to break down into sugars, (2) which enzymes degrade biomass most efficiently, and (3) how to advance the microbial production of ethanol and other gasoline-replaceable fuels from sugars.

User Facilities

Empowering an international community of scientists with the most advanced technologies

DOE Joint Genome Institute (JGI)

Sequencing more than 70 trillion DNA bases per year, the DOE JGI in Walnut Creek, California, is a national user facility that provides state-of-the-science capabilities for genome sequencing, synthesis, and analysis. With more than 1,100 collaborators worldwide on active projects, the DOE JGI is the preeminent resource for sequencing plants, microbes, and microbial communities foundational to energy and environmental research.

As one of the largest dedicated DNA sequencing facilities in the world, DOE JGI expertise and technologies enable analysis of complex genomes.

DOE Environmental Molecular Sciences Laboratory (EMSL)

By integrating experimentation with supercomputing, EMSL in Richland, Washington, enables the study of environmental challenges at the molecular level. EMSL has helped thousands of researchers use a multidisciplinary, collaborative approach to solve important challenges in biological interactions and dynamics, subsurface science, and interactions at the interfaces of natural and engineered materials.

The electron spectrometer at EMSL is used to study the chemical properties of materials at nanoscale resolution.

DOE Atmospheric Radiation Measurement (ARM) Climate Research Facility

The ARM Climate Research Facility provides highly instrumented ground stations at various locations, mobile resources, and aerial vehicles to continuously measure cloud and aerosol properties. ARM Facility measurements have set the standard for long-term climate research observations and provide an unparalleled resource for examining atmospheric processes and evaluating climate model performance.

Observations from the ARM Facility's scanning cloud radars reduce uncertainties in cloud parameterizations used in climate models.